



## **Kindergarteners Build to a Bright Future**

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Beth Wixson, kindergarten teacher at South Hill Elementary School, is no stranger to winning educational grants. In the last few years, she has been awarded Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) grants for a family reading program, a project that brought fifth-graders and kindergarteners together to sew quilts, and an activity center that can transform into anything from the Pony Express to a miniature Ithaca Bakery. This year, she may have outdone herself with her IPEI Teacher Grant selected by the review committee for its innovation and excellence and named one of the annual Charles E. Treman Jr. grants: "Introducing Kindergarteners to Architecture."

Two 2012-13 Teacher Grant recipients were selected to be funded by the Charles E. Treman Jr. Teacher Grant Endowment of the Tompkins Charitable Gift Fund in memory of the former president of the Tompkins Trust Company. Andrea Volckmar of DeWitt Middle School received the other one this year for "Ellis Island Immigration Experience". Her "community partners" were Thamora Fischel, Southeast Asia Program at Cornell, and Steve Yale-Loehr, author, professor and immigration lawyer.

This past fall, Wixson and her classroom aide Jen Demarest were trading ideas about which members of the community would make good educational partners. It occurred to them that architecture would be a perfect hands-on activity to keep the students' interest year-round. And they had the perfect community partner: Demarest's husband Noah is an architect in downtown Ithaca.

Since the project materials began arriving in December, Wixson has incorporated an architecture-based activity into her classroom each week since then. The kindergarteners made houses out of cereal boxes, built and painted popsicle stick structures, learned about the architects in nature who carry their houses on their backs, and drawn the designs for their blueprints. On days when no structured architecture activity was planned, Ithaca's youngest architects busied themselves with the multitude of IPEI-provided building materials including everything from Lincoln Logs to miniature stained "glass" windows. Wixson expressed, "The possibilities for play while learning were endless."

Wixson said her goal as a teacher is to make learning as interactive and play-based as possible, and that her students have really become engaged with architecture. "It's amazing," she remarked, holding up a popsicle structure, "you can really see their individual personalities in their buildings."

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